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African Ocean: A Case for Renaming WIO Based on Historic, Legal and Scientific Reasons

Justice Dr Syed Muhammad Anwer
Aalim Judge,
Federal Shariat Court, Pakistan

Abstract

The Indian Ocean Region is now the main stage for intense great-power competition and structural rebalancing, threatening stability and global commerce. For Pakistan, navigating this shift requires a layered maritime strategy that transcends crisis management. This strategy must integrate naval deterrence, technological investment, and climate resilience to secure economic lifelines (SLOCs), modernise critical infrastructure, and leverage diplomatic partnerships, thereby ensuring regional leadership amid accelerating multipolarity and environmental risks.

Key Words

Indian Ocean Region (IOR), Great-Power Competition, Pakistan Maritime Strategy, Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), Climate Resilience, Geopolitics, Naval Modernisation, Blue Economy.

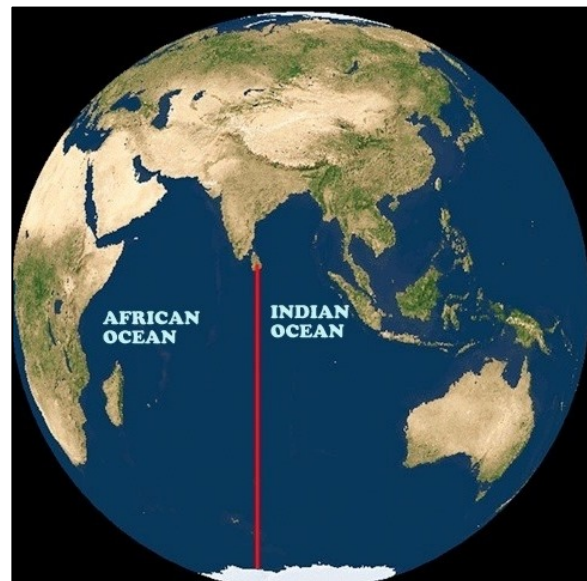
1. Introduction

The Western Indian Ocean (WIO), a vast expanse of water bordering the eastern coast of Africa, has long been a critical maritime domain, shaping global trade, exploration, and geopolitical dynamics. Historically, this body of water has been pivotal in connecting civilisations across continents and has therefore been known by many names, including;

- a. Erythrean Sea.
- b. Oriental Ocean.
- c. Mare Rubrum.

- d. Oceani Orientalis.
- e. East Ocean.
- f. Indian Ocean.
- g. Now, the Western Indian Ocean.

However, its current designation as the "Western Indian Ocean" reflects a colonial legacy that prioritises European and Indian-centric perspectives over its intrinsic African identity. My case study titled, "African Ocean: A Case for Renaming the WIO – Historic, Legal & Scientific Perspective" (2019)¹⁹¹, explores the rationale for renaming the WIO to the African Ocean. The study argues that the WIO has the longest coastline on the African continent—over 7,000 km—and possesses unique geographical, ecological, and historical attributes that warrant recognition as a distinct entity tied to the African continent.



The renaming campaign is not merely symbolic; it represents a decolonisation effort to reclaim African agency in maritime narratives. Africa's maritime domain has been sidelined due to centuries of colonial exploitation, where European powers imposed their worldviews, including cartographic naming conventions. Today, with evolving international boundaries and growing awareness of ocean governance, the time is ripe to address this oversight. This

¹⁹¹ African Ocean: A case for renaming the WIO Historic, Legal & Scientific Perspective by Dr Syed Mohammed Anwer, Maritime Study Forum (MSF), URL: <https://theafricanoccean.org/publications/>



Fig 1: In a map published by J. Janssonius in 1658, the present day WIO is referred to as **"Erythraei Sive Rvbrī Maris or Mare Erythraeum (in English, Erythrean Sea)"**

<https://www.geographicus.com/P/AntiqueMap/erythraeansea-jansson-1658>



Fig 2: 1625 Map of Africa by the Dutch Cartographer Jodocus Hondius. Present day WIO is depicted as **"Mare Rubrum."** This map is a part of Samuel Purchas, Hakluytus Posthumus, a compilation of voyages to foreign countries.

<https://www.geographicus.com/P/AntiqueMap/africaedescriptio-hondius-1625>

article examines the colonial designs behind the "Indian Ocean" label, the historical identity of the WIO, and multifaceted reasons for renaming it to the more legally and scientifically accurate "African Ocean". Furthermore, it connects this proposal to contemporary geopolitical initiatives like CPEC 2.0 and the Maritime Silk Route, highlighting potential synergies for trade, cultural exchange, and strategic partnerships in the region.



Fig 3: The map titled "Africae" by John Speed, published in 1676, is a fascinating cartographic depiction of Africa from the 17th century. The Map depicts present-day WIO as **"The East Ocean"**

https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~285354~90058027:Africae-?sort=pub_list_no_initialsort%2Cpub_date%2Cpub_list_no%2Cseries_no



Fig 4: Africa by Nicolaes Visscher I. 1656-77. The map depicts present-day WIO as "Oceani Orientalis"

<https://sanderusmaps.com/our-catalogue/antique-maps/africa/africa-by-nicolaes-visscher-i>

1.1 Colonial Agenda & Design Behind the Unreasonable Name of "Indian Ocean"

The naming of the Indian Ocean, particularly its western segment, is deeply intertwined with European colonial ambitions during the "Scramble for Africa"¹⁹² in the 19th century. European empires, driven by the "3Cs" of Civilisation, Christianity, and Commerce, sought to dominate African territories and resources. Maps became tools of power, using colours, boundaries, and names to assert control and demarcate spheres of influence. The ocean east of Africa, once called the Erythraean Sea, was rebranded as the "Indian Ocean" to align with British hegemonic interests, especially after the consolidation of control over India.

This renaming was strategic. By labelling the ocean as "Indian," the British extended their administrative boundaries from the Bombay Presidency, marking the sea as an extension of their Indian colony. This deterred rivals like the French and Portuguese from encroaching eastward.



The "Indian Ocean" label is unreasonable because it overlooks Africa's dominant coastline. No logical geographical or scientific basis justifies associating this region primarily with India; it was a colonial construct to facilitate empire-building. Post-colonial Africa

¹⁹² Scramble for Africa, Britannica Encyclopedia, URL: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Scramble-for-Africa>

continues to bear this baggage, where the ocean's name perpetuates a Eurocentric worldview, sidelining African nations in global maritime discourse. Renaming it the African Ocean would rectify this historical injustice, empowering African states to assert sovereignty over their adjacent waters.

1.2 Historical Identity of the Western Indian Ocean (WIO)

The historical identity of the WIO predates colonial interventions, rooted in ancient navigation and trade. Ancient mariners relied on periplus accounts—logs detailing ports, landmarks, and routes—for guidance. The "Periplus of the Erythraean Sea," written by an anonymous Greek author in the 1st century CE, is a seminal document describing the shoreline from Berenice in Egypt southward, encompassing the Red Sea and what is now the WIO. It mentions places like the "Cape of Spices" (Horn of Africa) and "Frankincense Country" (Yemen), highlighting the region's role in the spice and incense trade.

European cartographers initially adopted this name, with maps like Janssonius's 1658 depiction labelling it "Mare Erythraeum."¹⁹³ Over centuries, names evolved: Mare Rubrum (Red Sea), Oriental Ocean, Eastern Ocean. However, during the Scramble for Africa, these were supplanted by "Indian Ocean" to serve colonial agendas. Analysis of historical maps from the 17th to 19th centuries shows a shift: early Dutch and French maps used "Ocean Orientalis,"¹⁹⁴ but British influence standardised "Indian Ocean" by the 1800s.

This evolution underscores the WIO's African-centric history. The colonial renaming erased this identity, but reclaiming "African Ocean" aligns with historical precedents, emphasising its longest African coastline and cultural ties to the continent.

2. Movement for Renaming WIO as the African Ocean

The Pan-African movement to rename the WIO as the African Ocean¹⁹⁵, as articulated in my case study, is an academic effort grounded in cultural, legal, and scientific reasoning to decolonise maritime nomenclature. It highlights the WIO's distinctness—geographically, ecologically, and historically—from the broader Indian Ocean. International organisations increasingly recognise the WIO

¹⁹³ Janssonius in 1658, the present day WIO is referred to as "**Erythraei Sive Rvbri Maris or Mare Erythraeum (in English, Erythrean Sea)**". URL: <https://www.geographicus.com/P/AntiqueMap/erythraeansea-jansson-1658>

¹⁹⁴ Africa by Nicolaes Visscher I. 1656-77. The map depicts present day WIO as "Oceani Orientalis". URL: <https://sanderusmaps.com/our-catalogue/antique-maps/africa/africa-by-nicolaes-visscher-i>

¹⁹⁵ African Ocean Campaign, Home Page, URL: <https://theafricanocean.org/>

as an independent entity, providing a foundation for this renaming. The grassroots movement argues that "African Ocean" better represents its linkage to Africa, which has been underplayed for millennia.¹⁹⁶



2.1 Scientific Reasons for Renaming WIO as the African Ocean

Scientifically, the WIO is a unique ecosystem warranting separate recognition. Organisations like the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA) promote research on marine sciences, emphasising the region's biodiversity and conservation needs. The region spans from Somalia's monsoon-influenced waters to South Africa's subtropical ecosystem, featuring distinct bathymetric, hydrographic, and ecological traits.

¹⁹⁶ Honest Media, Petition to Rename Western Indian Ocean the African Ocean, URL: <https://honestmediablog.com/2020/06/22/petition-to-rename-western-indian-ocean-the-african-ocean/>

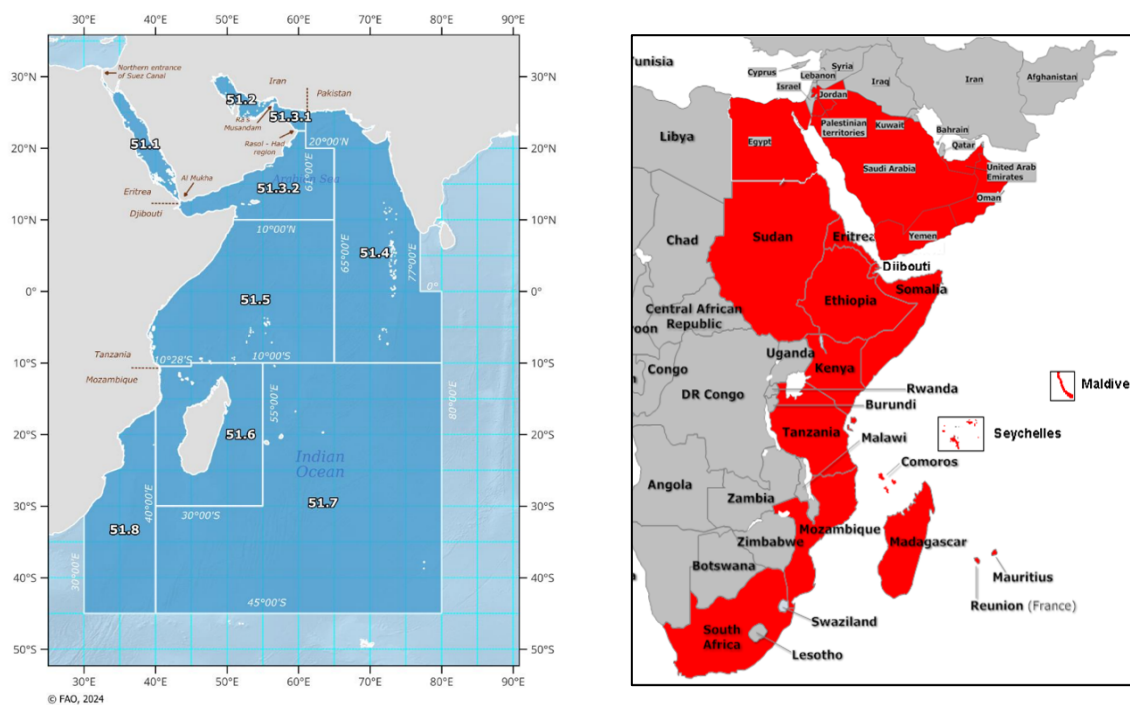
FAO fisheries data¹⁹⁷ delineate the WIO as Major Fishing Area 51, with subareas such as the Red Sea and the Mozambique Channel, based on empirical evidence. WWF identifies the Eastern African Marine Ecoregion as a biodiversity hotspot, with unique species adapted to tropical conditions. Bathymetric mapping by the IBCWIO further confirms its independent physiography.

Renaming acknowledges these scientific distinctions, fostering targeted environmental policies and research. The WIO's 480,000 km² area, with high productivity and threats from climate change, demands an African-focused identity for sustainable management.

2.2 Legal Reasons for Renaming WIO as the African Ocean

Legally, numerous international instruments treat the WIO as distinct. The Nairobi Convention (1985) protects the marine environment of the "Western Indian Ocean region," with parties including Comoros, Kenya, and South Africa. Its protocols address pollution and protected areas, explicitly defining the region.

The Western Indian Ocean Tuna Organisation (WIOTO, 1991) and the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) delineate the WIO for fisheries management. The Djibouti Code of Conduct (amended 2017) covers maritime security in the WIO



¹⁹⁷ FAO shows the boundaries of the Western Indian Ocean (Major Fishing Area 51), Fisheries and Aquaculture, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, URL: <https://www.fao.org/fishery/en/area/51>

and the Gulf of Aden.¹⁹⁸ UNEP and World Bank projects also use "WIO" for legal frameworks.

These treaties provide a basis for renaming, as they recognise the WIO's autonomy. A new name would align legal nomenclature with geographical reality, enhancing African states' jurisdictional claims under UNCLOS.

2.3 Cultural Reasons for Renaming WIO as the African Ocean

Culturally, the WIO is integral to African heritage. Ancient trade routes fostered Swahili culture, blending African, Arab, and Indian influences. Coastal communities in Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique share linguistic and traditional ties rooted in maritime activities.

The region's diverse population, united as African, has been marginalised by colonial-era naming practices. Renaming would affirm cultural sovereignty and celebrate African contributions to global maritime history. UNESCO recognises the WIO's cultural landscapes, such as Zanzibar's Stone Town, linked to ocean trade and the marine world heritage¹⁹⁹. This cultural reclamation counters Eurocentric narratives, promoting pride and unity among African nations.

2.4 Geo-Strategic Reasons for Renaming WIO as the African Ocean

Geo-strategically, the WIO is vital for global trade, with key shipping lanes carrying oil and goods.²⁰⁰ Renaming enhances Africa's strategic positioning, facilitating the repression of piracy through the Djibouti Code, thereby highlighting its key security importance.

The region's resources—fisheries, minerals—offer economic potential amid great-power competition. An African Ocean identity strengthens regional blocs, such as the African Union, in negotiations, fostering stability and development in a multipolar world.

¹⁹⁸ Djibouti Code of Conduct, International Maritime Organisation (IMO), URL: <https://www.imo.org/en/ourwork/security/pages/content-and-evolution-of-the-djibouti-code-of-conduct.aspx>

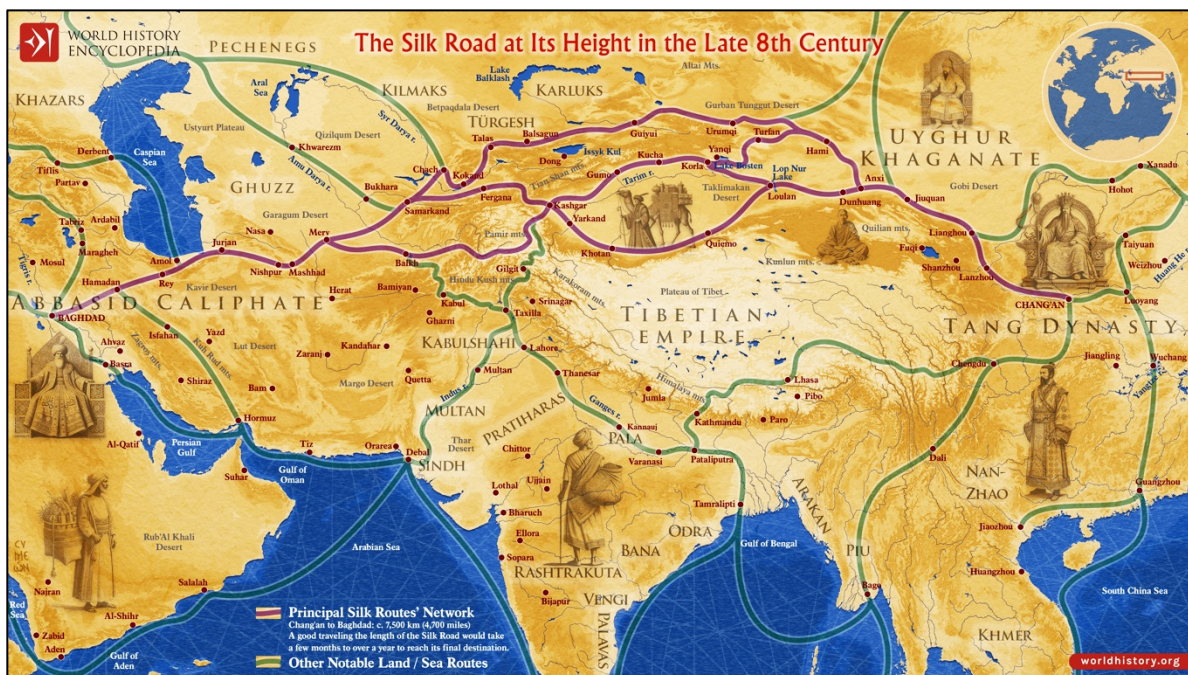
¹⁹⁹ Assessing Marine World Heritage from an Ecosystem Perspective Series n°32 - July 2012, UNESCO, World Heritage Convention, URL: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/series/32>

²⁰⁰ The Significance Of African Ocean In A Change Geopolitical World, Hilal English, URL: <https://www.hilal.gov.pk/view-article.php?i=3929>

3. CPEC 2.0 and the Maritime Silk Route

CPEC 2.0, the second phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, launched amid Pakistan's political challenges, extends the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It focuses on industrialisation, agriculture, and connectivity, linking Gwadar Port to China's Maritime Silk Road (MSR). The MSR aims to boost infrastructure from Asia to Africa, with CPEC as a land-sea bridge.

Renaming the WIO aligns with this, positioning the African Ocean as a hub for Sino-African ties via Pakistan. The earliest recorded maritime trade in human history commenced around 3000 BCE between the Indus Valley Civilisation (present-day Pakistan) and Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), with Oman and the broader Arabian Peninsula serving as vital intermediaries along the routes of the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf. This ancient network facilitated the exchange of oil, dates, copper, pearls, and ivory, making the Indus region a foundational hub of global commerce long before the European colonial onslaught. Ports such as Patala (near modern Thatta), Barbarikon (at the Indus delta), Debal (near present-day Karachi), and Lahari Bandar (in Thatta) were already active maritime gateways connecting South Asia to Mesopotamia, East Africa, and the Red Sea trade circuits. Centuries later, during the Tang (618–907 CE) dynasty,²⁰¹ China actively traded through these same coastal corridors of modern Pakistan, dispatching silk, porcelain, and tea westward while importing frankincense, myrrh,

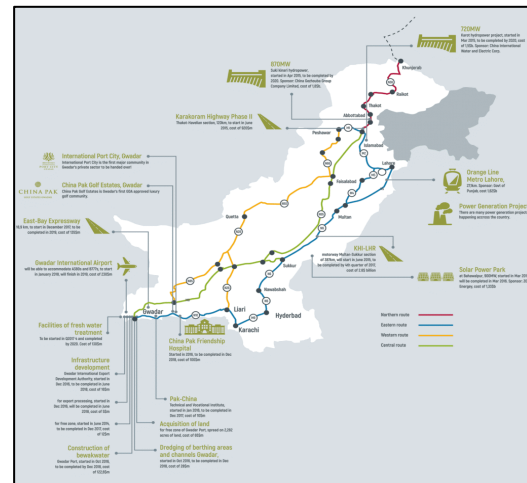


²⁰¹ Joshua J Mark, World History Encyclopedia, Silk Road, URL: https://www.worldhistory.org/Silk_Road/

and African ivory via overland–maritime hybrid routes that converged on the Makran and Sindh coasts. Remarkably, the same historical ports—Patala, Barbarikon, Debal, Lahari Bandar, (their modern successors being Gwadar, Ormara, Pasni and Karachi)—have endured for over five millennia as strategic nodes, positioning contemporary Pakistan, through Gwadar and the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, as the natural bridge reconnecting China's 21st-century Maritime Silk Road with the Arabian Peninsula and the proposed African Ocean region, thus restoring an ancient continuum of trade that colonial cartography had artificially fragmented.

3.1 Maritime Trade & Shipping Potential

The African Ocean's trade potential is immense, with ports like Mombasa and Durban handling global cargo. CPEC 2.0 enhances this via Gwadar, offering shorter routes to Africa, reducing costs and boosting shipping. Digital finance innovations in the corridor further facilitate trade, linking Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.²⁰²



3.2 Cultural & Strategic Linkages with African Ocean Region Countries

Pakistan and China share strategic bonds with African nations, countering India and securing resources. Cultural linkages include historical ties along the Maritime Silk Road and shared Islamic heritage. CPEC 2.0 fosters people-to-people exchanges, with Pakistan as a gateway to Africa. Strategically, it provides China with access to warm waters, enhancing BRI's reach and promoting regional stability.

²⁰² Dr Mehmood Ul Hassan Khan, CPEC 2.0: Prospects & Constraints and Way Forward, Pakistan Observer, URL: <https://pakobserver.net/cpec-2-0-prospects-constraints-and-way-forward/>

3.3 Global Recognition of Western Indian Ocean as a Distinct Maritime Entity

The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) is increasingly acknowledged by international, regional, and national organisations as a discrete oceanic domain, distinguished by its unique geographical, ecological, hydrographic, and socio-cultural attributes. This recognition stems from a confluence of legal frameworks, scientific research, and policy initiatives that delineate the WIO's boundaries, emphasise its biodiversity hotspots, and highlight its independent geophysical features—such as the influence of the Somali Plate on regional tectonics—and cultural mosaic rooted in African coastal communities. Spanning approximately 480,000 km² with over 7,000 km of African coastline, the WIO extends from the monsoon-driven waters off Somalia to the subtropical Agulhas Current near South Africa, encompassing diverse ecosystems from coral reefs to mangrove forests. These elements underscore the WIO's autonomy from the broader Indian Ocean, positioning it as a self-contained entity warranting the designation "African Ocean" to reflect its profound continental linkages.

This synthesises evidence of my case study, cataloguing key organisations, conventions, and rationales that affirm the WIO's distinctiveness. The analysis is structured into legal, scientific, and institutional dimensions, illustrating how global bodies have operationalised the WIO as a unified region for conservation, resource management, and security.

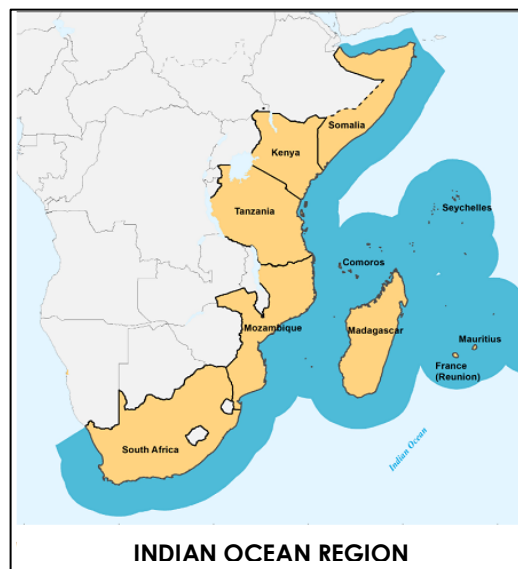
4. Legal and Treaty-Based Recognition

International conventions and regional treaties provide the foundational legal scaffolding for treating the WIO as a sovereign maritime space. These instruments explicitly define their boundaries, often through precise coordinates, and establish governance mechanisms tailored to their African-centric profile.

4.1 Nairobi Convention for the Protection, Management, and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Eastern African Region (1985, amended 2010). As the cornerstone of WIO environmental law, this UNEP Regional Seas Programme treaty recognises the WIO region's²⁰³ economic and social values in its preamble, emphasising its "marine and coastal environment." Contracting parties—Comoros, France, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania, and South Africa—define the

²⁰³ The Nairobi Convention, UN Environment Programme, URL: <https://www.unep.org/nairobi-convention>

convention area as encompassing riparian, marine, and coastal zones, including watersheds. A UNEP collaborative report further delineates the WIO from Somalia's monsoon regime to South Africa's temperate tip, highlighting its tropical-subtropical diversity, mainland coasts (Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa), and island archipelagos (Madagascar, Seychelles, Comoros, Mauritius, French Territories). This framework underscores the WIO's structural unity, distinct from adjacent oceans.



4.2 Convention on the Western Indian Ocean Tuna Organisation (WIOTO, 1991, entered into force 1992). This pioneering treaty establishes the WIOTO to conserve and manage highly migratory tuna species, explicitly delineating the WIO via Annex II coordinates: from 11°00'N off India's east coast, southward to 45°00'S at 80°00'E, westward to 30°00'E along Africa's coast. Founding states (Comoros, India, Kenya, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Tanzania) affirm the WIO's independence, with objectives including policy harmonisation, surveillance, and access to exclusive economic zones. It marks the first international treaty to isolate the WIO for fisheries governance legally.²⁰⁴

4.3 Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) Convention (1993). Referencing WIOTO in its preamble, the IOTC reinforces the WIO's separation²⁰⁵, acknowledges prior delineation efforts, and promotes regional cooperation distinct from broader Indian Ocean dynamics.

4.4 Revised Djibouti Code of Conduct (Jeddah Amendment, 2017). Adopted by signatories including Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania, and Yemen, this IMO-facilitated instrument addresses piracy, armed robbery, human trafficking, and IUU fishing in the "Western Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden Area." It treats the WIO as a

²⁰⁴ WIOTO, Faculty of Law, University of Oslo, URL: <https://www.jus.uio.no/english/services/library/treaties/08/8-02/west-indian-ocean-tuna.html>

²⁰⁵ IOTC, OUTCOMES OF THE FIFTEENTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION, URL: <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/487bc1c3-4b74-4219-9ee3-06ce915105f0/content>

bounded security zone, separate from the Gulf of Aden, enabling targeted capacity-building for maritime safety and sustainable development.²⁰⁶

These treaties collectively embed the WIO's African identity, with boundaries often anchored to the continent's 7,000 km eastern coastline, fostering unified African-led governance.

5. Scientific and Ecological Recognition

Scientific bodies leverage empirical data—such as bathymetry, biodiversity metrics, and oceanographic modelling—to validate the WIO's uniqueness. Its ecosystems, influenced by the Somali Plate's tectonic rifting and upwelling, support endemic species and high productivity, distinguishing it from neighbouring basins.

	Organization/Initiative	Key Recognition Criteria	Distinct Features Highlighted
1.	Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA, est. 1993)	Promotes marine sciences across 10 WIO countries (Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa, Comoros, Madagascar, Seychelles, Mauritius, Réunion). Links research to ecosystem management.	Biodiversity conservation; sustains marine resources amid diverse coastal cultures united by African heritage. Registered under Zanzibar laws, emphasizing regional autonomy.
2.	Consortium for the Conservation of Coastal & Marine Ecosystems (WIO-C, launched 2007)²⁰⁷	Partners (Nairobi Convention Secretariat, IUCN ESARO, WIOMSA, CORDIO) focus on resilience-building, informed by the 2012 State of the Coast	High biodiversity mosaics; addresses poverty alleviation through sustainable livelihoods in WIO's unique coastal socio-ecological systems.

²⁰⁶ Djibouti Code of Conduct (Jeddah Amendment), International Maritime Organisation (IMO), URL: <https://www.imo.org/en/mediacentre/pages/whatsnew-1727.aspx>

²⁰⁷ Guiding Principles, WIO-C, URL: https://wio-c.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/guiding_principles_for_wio-c_-_final.pdf

	Organization/Initiative	Key Recognition Criteria	Distinct Features Highlighted
		Report. ²⁰⁸ Builds on Mangroves for the Future initiative.	
3.	Western Indian Ocean Coastal Challenge (WIOCC)²⁰⁹	Country-led partnership (Comoros, France-Réunion, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Tanzania, Zanzibar) with global allies (EU, IOC, UNEP, CBD, GLISPA, WIO-C).	Climate-resilient development balancing biodiversity conservation and livelihoods; recognizes WIO's tropical island-mainland gradient as a functional unit.
4.	Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Major Fishing Area 51	Delineates WIO with subareas (e.g., Red Sea 51.1, Somalia-Kenya-Tanzania 51.5, Mozambique Channel 51.6), bounded from India's southeast coast (77°00'E) southward to 45°00'S, westward to Africa's coast.	Hydrographic diversity (monsoons, eddies); supports tuna-like species; divided into 8 subareas reflecting ecological gradients from upwelling zones to oceanic expanses.
5.	World Wildlife Fund (WWF) East African Marine Ecoregion (EAME)²¹⁰	Covers 480,000 km ² along 4,600 km coast (Somalia to South Africa); extends to islands (Comoros, Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius, Réunion).	Endemic biodiversity (corals, mangroves); temperature regimes (17-31°C); cultural adaptations in African coastal communities; high productivity threatened by climate change.

²⁰⁸ WIOMSA, Regional State of the Coast Report Western Indian Ocean, URL: https://www.wiomsga.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Regional_State_of_the_Coast_Report_Western_Indian_OceanRSOCR_Final.pdf.pdf

²⁰⁹ WIOCC, Department of Economic & Social Affairs, United Nations, UR: <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/western-indian-ocean-coastal-challenge-wiocc>

²¹⁰ The Eastern African Marine Ecoregion, WWF, URL: https://wwfeu.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/eame_fpa_book_1_.pdf

	Organization/Initiative	Key Recognition Criteria	Distinct Features Highlighted
6.	United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)	Describes WIO's latitudinal span (Somalia monsoons to KwaZulu-Natal subtropics); geomorphological unity via bathymetry and currents (Mozambique Channel eddies, East Madagascar Current, Agulhas retroflexion).	Tectonic influences (Somali Plate rifting); diverse habitats fostering African socio-political cohesion despite ethnic diversity.
7.	International Bathymetric Chart of the Western Indian Ocean (IBCWIO, IOC/UNESCO-Germany)²¹¹	Bathymetric mapping (36°S-27°N, 20°E-70°E) via GEBCO; produces GIS datasets for resource exploration and environmental decisions.	Ocean-floor topography mirroring land equivalents; reveals Somali Plate-driven features like rift valleys, supporting independent ecological modelling.

These global initiatives highlight the WIO's separate ecosystem: nutrient-rich upwellings from the Somali Plate fuel biodiversity hotspots, while cultural syncretism unites its 7000 km African shoreline.

6. Institutional and Developmental Recognition

Developmental agencies reinforce the WIO's status through targeted investments, viewing it as an economically viable, culturally cohesive African domain.

6.1 World Bank. Funds the Western Indian Ocean Marine Highway Development and Coastal/Marine Contamination Prevention Project, enhancing

²¹¹ World Meteorological Department, IOC Editorial Board for the International Bathymetric Chart of the Western Indian Ocean (IBCWIO), fifth session, Quatre Bornes, Mauritius, 24-28 July 2000, URL: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000128512> & <https://www.ngdc.noaa.gov/mgg/ibcwio/ibcwio.html>

trade and pollution control along African coasts, affirming the region's blue economy potential.²¹²

6.2 Global Environment Facility (GEF) via WIO-LaB Project: Addresses land-based pollution with the UNEP/UNOPS/Nairobi Secretariat; objectives include reducing ecosystem stress, strengthening legal protections against pollution, and building capacity for sustainable African development.

This multifaceted recognition—spanning law, science, and policy—establishes the WIO as a geopolitically and ecologically autonomous entity. Its African shoreline, Somali Plate tectonics, and cultural unity demand a nomenclature like "African Ocean" to decolonise maritime discourse and empower regional agency. As global ocean boundaries evolve, these frameworks provide a blueprint for integrated governance, ensuring the WIO's legacy as humanity's cradle endures sustainably.

7. Conclusion

Renaming the WIO as the **African Ocean** is a fundamental and necessary step, grounded in historical, scientific, legal, and cultural reasons as discussed herein. It dismantles colonial legacies and empowers Africa. Integrating with CPEC 2.0 and the global Maritime Silk Route network unlocks trade and geostrategic potential, fostering a connected, prosperous future for the African Continent. This shift not only honours Africa's maritime heritage but also positions it centrally in global affairs.

²¹² Global Environment Facility, World Bank, URL: <https://www.thegef.org/projects-operations/projects/2098>